

ACCEPT WISDOM'S INVITATION

May 14, 2006

Key Verse:

Does not wisdom
call out? Does
not understanding
raise her voice?
—Proverbs 8:1

Devotional Reading:

Proverbs 8:10-21

Background Scripture:

Proverbs 8, 9

Proverbs 8:1-5, 22-32

¹ Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?

² On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand;

³ beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud:

⁴ “To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind.

⁵ “You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding.”

²² “The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old;

²³ “I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.

²⁴ “When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water;

²⁵ “before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth,

²⁶ “before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world.

²⁷ “I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,

²⁸ “when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,

²⁹ “when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

³⁰ “Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence,

³¹ “rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.

³² “Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways.”

The Wise Life

Proverbs 8 uses an interesting literary technique called personification to portray wisdom. This means that wisdom takes a personality and becomes the companion of God in creating Heaven and earth. Wisdom is also the channel of God's blessing.

Invitation to Wisdom

8:1-3. A common cartoon situation depicts someone scaling a tall mountain to talk to a person on the top. This person is assumed to be a fount of wisdom, able to answer any and all human questions. The cartoon punch line is often based on the fact that such isolated hermits have little insight and give ridiculous advice.

The Bible does not portray wisdom this way. *Wisdom* calls to us. Wisdom is presented as making this invitation at the most public places of the ancient city: *on the heights*, at the most trafficked *paths*, at the city's entrance *gates*, and at the *entrances* to all the homes. Wisdom does not play hide-and-seek with us. We can find wisdom and understanding in the pages of Scripture if we approach them with faith and willing obedience.

4, 5. Wisdom submits a universal challenge: Get me! There is no elitism here. Wisdom is not restricted to highly intelligent or deeply spiritual people. The most *foolish* among us can reverse course and begin to incorporate godliness in his or her life. Likewise, the wisest, most godly people can be even wiser and more consistently righteous in their choices. No one is ever beyond hope for wisdom, nor is anyone above the need for becoming wiser still.

It is never too late or too early to begin to live wisely. I have crossed paths with many young people who are sold out to living for God and make careful, prayerful

choices. I have also known people who have come to faith late in life and begin to make consistent, godly choices for the first time. This does not mean the effects of all their bad choices instantly disappear, but error is no longer compounded by additional error. Things do get better, even in the most chaotic of lives.

Origins and Purpose of Wisdom

22. God is the creator of wisdom. See Genesis 4:1 where this same Hebrew verb is used in the sense of "giving birth to." Proverbs does not present wisdom as something uncreated, then. Wisdom is the initial creation of God. In the Genesis account, the first thing created is light (Genesis 1:3). In some ways, wisdom is indeed light—the enlightenment of humans as to the ways of God.

In other ways wisdom is the foundation of creation. God does not create wisdom after designing the universe. The universe is not self-explanatory. God's wisdom is shown in every aspect of creation: material, spiritual, and ethical (see Psalm 50:6).

23-26. This text emphatically states that wisdom precedes any aspect of material creation. Even the most spectacular geographical features of our planet—the heights of the *mountains* and the depths of the oceans—came after the creation of wisdom. Wisdom takes second place to nothing in the created *world*.

Those who study the natural world are repeatedly amazed by the complexity they find. When fields such as cell biology and quantum mechanics cease to search for naturalistic explanations for life, their discoveries are breathtaking in their depth. It is estimated that human cells have 3.5 billion genetic bases, allowing for almost infinite genetic variety. Each human being is made up of billions of such cells. Each cell contains billions of lines of genetic code.

When these findings are put under the perspective of faith in a creator, we stand in awe. The raw intellectual power behind all of this is far beyond our comprehension (Jeremiah 10:12). Yet the Bible does not speak of God’s intelligence, but of his wisdom. God’s wisdom permeates every aspect of the created universe. We will never be able to comprehend that wisdom fully.

27, 28a. The author now describes wisdom’s presence at the creation of the heavens. For those in the ancient world, the heavens are everything *above* the landmass of the earth. This would include both the sky (where birds fly) and the place of spiritual residence for God and the angels. The spiritual world was also created by God according to his pattern of wisdom.

Some people believe that spiritual principles are unscientific and illogical. Proverbs will not stand for this line of argument. Just as God created an orderly and brilliant material world, he created a spiritual world intended to conform to his patterns of wisdom. The fact that sin exists on the spiritual level is a testimony to the reality that created beings have been able to choose against God’s mandates and thus play the spiritual fool.

28b, 29. The vast seas are very mysterious and majestic to people in both the ancient and modern worlds. While we know more about the oceans today, they still remain untamed. Yet as with the rest of creation, the oceans are subject to the laws of God. God has not created something that he cannot control. The mam-

moth might of the oceans is a part of the master plan of the wise creator.

30, 31. The personification of wisdom takes a new twist here. God has not only created wisdom and used it to design the rest of creation, he also takes special *delight* in wisdom. Likewise, wisdom rejoices at being with God. We see here echoes of God’s judgment at the end of creation: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

As we find elsewhere in the Bible, the crown of God’s creation is humanity itself (Psalm 8:5). God created us in his image, to be in fellowship with him. This brings a delight to God that we cannot fully understand but only appreciate. This appreciation, however, helps us understand why God wants us to behave wisely. When we choose sin and act as fools, we take away God’s delight and joy and cause him grief (Genesis 6:5, 6; Ephesians 4:30).

32. The invitation to wisdom is repeated, now with the promise of a blessing to those who heed her. This invitation is a win-win situation. We win because we begin to make wise, moral choices that will be honored by God and will avoid the chaos and self-inflicted pain of the foolish life. God wins because his lost children have come home. His delight is restored. What a motivation to make wise choices, to live lives of godliness! May we not do this as a way of earning a reward. May we do this, rather, out of the realization that God, our creator, has shown us how to live, even in our culture of moral confusion and relativity.

Key Concept

The invitation to wisdom comes from God himself. He invites us to wisdom because he knows this is the best course for us to follow. The wise life is the life for which God created us.

DISCOVERY LEARNING

Accept Wisdom's Invitation

A Dialogue with Wisdom

For this exercise pretend that wisdom is a person. Imagine that wisdom is having a dialogue with a seeker of wisdom in order to uncover wisdom's true nature. Below are the questions the seeker asks. Supply the answers given by wisdom in Proverbs 8:1-5, 22-32.

Seeker: Where can wisdom be found?
From where does it call to us?

Wisdom: _____

Seeker: What is wisdom's challenge to us?

Wisdom: _____

Seeker: From where and when did wisdom come into being?

Wisdom: _____

Seeker: How was wisdom involved in creation?

Wisdom: _____

Seeker: What does wisdom think of the world in general and people in particular?

Wisdom: _____

Seeker: What is promised to those who follow God's wisdom?

Wisdom: _____

How Wise Are They?

Below are several famous quotations that reflect worldly points of view. Respond to each quote with an appropriate Scripture passage that indicates God's wisdom on the subject.

1. "Religion is the opium of the masses."
—Karl Marx

Scripture: _____

2. "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

—Chairman Mao Tse-tung

Scripture: _____

3. "If you wish to be a success in the world, promise everything, deliver nothing."
—Napoleon Bonaparte

Scripture: _____

4. "You can get much farther with a kind word and a gun than you can with a kind word alone."
—Al Capone

Scripture: _____

5. "Christ died for our sins. Dare we make his martyrdom meaningless by not committing them?"

—Jules Feiffer

Scripture: _____

6. "I am free of all prejudices. I hate everyone equally."
—W.C. Fields

Scripture: _____

7. "Under capitalism man exploits man; under socialism the reverse is true."

—Polish proverb

Scripture: _____

8. "Success is the sole earthly judge of right and wrong."
—Adolf Hitler

Scripture: _____